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News Release



County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force

METH AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

CREATIVE COURT PROGRAM BREAKS THE CYCLE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DRUG USE

Thanks to a new pilot project, more and more criminal defendants passing through court, are graduating from a unique program that combines counseling in both domestic violence and substance abuse, which frequently go hand in hand. One of those graduates joined officials and drug and domestic violence counselors at a press conference this week, outside the East County Courthouse, where the pilot program began in June 2007.

"Meth use and domestic violence can be a deadly combination, and this new pilot integrates treatment and offers a real solution to an often fatal issue," said San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob.

According to the County of San Diego's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, 53% of intimate partner fatality cases from 2006 through 2009, involved current or past use of methamphetamine.

Alarmed by the numbers, justices, deputy district attorneys, public defenders and treatment professionals all realized that domestic violence defendants needed a much more structured and rigid level of care. The East County Pilot Project was initiated, addressing the dual issues of substance abuse and domestic violence.

Domestic violence offenders have been required for years to participate in a 52 week domestic violence (batterer's treatment) program. This standard Level One program did not address substance abuse issues in a significant way. But after seeing defendants frequently failed drug tests in the Level One program, the Court created a Level Two component, which mandates random drug testing and group counseling.

According to counselors, most of the defendants in the Level One program openly admitted to using alcohol, illicit drugs and prescription pills, without the threat of being reprimanded.

When entering the Level Two program, defendants must sign an agreement which notifies them that a Drug Testing Facility will share the results of their tests with the Court and Treatment Counselors. The threat of admonishment from the Court and treatment professionals, has forced most defendants to stop their substance abuse.

"The drug testing piece of this held me accountable in ways I couldn't talk my way out of. The judge knew everything I had done – or not – all of the time. This pressure helped me change," said Virginia Fouquette, a new graduate of the program.

Treatment in the Level Two program, includes a once a week group counseling session, with no more than 12 defendants to a group. Participants focus on their self-esteem while learning how drugs and alcohol can impair their ability to make good decisions.

Initial results indicate a 90% reduction in failed drug tests from the defendants who completed the Level Two program.

"I have worked on the treatment side of family violence for many years, said Audie Brinker, Chairperson of the Substance Abuse Committee of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council. "I have seen offenders drop out prematurely when their violence and substance abuse issues could not be addressed. We knew that for many offenders, the secret would lie in a one-stop program. The Level Two option is just such an integrated program."

After a successful 18 month trial run, the pilot has generated interest in having it expand to other regions of the San Diego County court system. A system dedicated to breaking the cycle of domestic violence and substance abuse.

"We believe that court supervision means that we can ensure safety for families, and the appropriate treatment for defendants," said East County Superior Court Judge, DeAnn Salcido.

Community residents who need referrals for drug treatment can contact 1-877-No-2-Meth or visit the web site at www.no2meth.org.. To seek assistance for domestic violence related issues, call the San Diego Countywide Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-888-DVLINKS (1-888-385-4657)

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